

key issues, among them: religious freedom and the relationship of religion to the state; political absolutism and democracy; nationalism and the state; and patriarchy and gender relations. Cole devotes an entire chapter to a discussion of each of these complex issues. He insists on viewing Bahá'ísm, especially during its formative period, as a tradition in flux or, one might say, as a set of general principles and values that had to be fleshed out, refined, and adjusted in response both to changing conditions and to the perspectives of other intellectual and spiritual traditions. This seems clearly to have been the view of the early leaders of the movement, including Baha'ullah himself. Within the context of these qualifications, Bahá'ísm did come to define its position vis-á-vis the critical issues posed by Enlightenment modernity. On a number of the principles to which Enlightenment modernity was committed, Bahá'ísm declared itself in essential agreement: for example, on the question of the separation of "church" and state, the primacy of the individual conscience, gender equality, and the rule of law.

But if Bahá'ísm did come to endorse many of the characteristic ideas and values of modernity, Bahá'ísm did find some aspects of modernity, especially some of the larger historical consequences that followed, or that seemed to follow, from its implementation profoundly troubling. The idea of an autonomous reason, and what Bahá'ísm saw as the repressive potential of a reason freed from the constraints of a transcendental frame of reference, raised serious questions at both the theoretical and practical levels. The industrialization of war and the enlarged destructive capacity of the modern army, all developed within the framework of modernity, had led to violence and death on a scale without precedent in the history of humankind. These and other reservations, articulated repeatedly in the early literature of the movement, led Bahá'ís increasingly to reject modernism's emphasis on the primacy of reason and its secularism — its Jacobin tendencies — and to call for the integration of religious dimension into the framework of Enlightenment modernism. Bahá'ísm insisted that only a religious dimension is capable of providing the kind of constraints that the secularist and rationalist aspects of modernist doctrines need to protect them against excess — a concern dramatically underscored by the events of the modern period. To the degree that Cole endorses this Bahá'í emphasis on the importance of a religious dimension, some readers will undoubtedly see the present work as in part an apologia for religion. Whether one agrees with the position articulated in this work or not, one must concede that Cole has raised a set of issues that demand careful, critical attention.

This reflective and insightful work is based on an impressive array of primary (in some cases unpublished) sources, not to mention a very large body of secondary, interpretative studies, as will be seen from the notes and the bibliography at the end of the work. It is an important study that will commend itself especially to those who are concerned with modernist doctrine, Bahá'í responses to that doctrine, and the implications of both for a fuller understanding of important facets of Middle Eastern history,

especially during the last decades of the nineteenth century.

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